

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 STATE 226456
ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ONY-00 /011 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:MACASEY/UNHOWELL
APPROVED BY NEA/ARN:WNHOWELL
DESIRED DISTRIBUTION
NEA ONLY

-----127613 070220Z /70

P 070146Z SEP 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 226456

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:PINT, SHUM, SY

SUBJECT: 1978 CONGRESSIONAL COUNTRY REPORT ON HUMAN
RIGHTS PRACTICES: SYRIA

REF : STATE 212848

PROVIDED BELOW FOR YOUR COMMENTS IS NEA'S FIRST DRAFT OF
THE 1978 HU'AN RIGHTS REPORT ON SYRIA WHICH WILL BE SUB-
MITTED TO THE CONGRESS AS AN UNCLASSIFIED DOCUMENT. SINCE
WE MUST DELIVER THE REPORT BY SEPTEMBER 15 TO NEA/RA FOR
APPROPRIATE CLEARANCES IN THE BUILDING, WE WOULD APPRECI-
ATE HAVING YOUR THOUGHTS BY COB SEPTEMBER THIRTEEN. PER
REFTEL, E WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR ADDING ANY SPECIFICS,
SUCH AS ECONOMIC DATA, WHICH YOU FEEL WOULD BE APPROPRIATE.
PARAGRAPHS HAVE BEEN NUMBERED WITH ROMAN NUMERALS FOR
REFERENCING.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 226456

ISYRIA, ,RADITIONALLY ONE OF THE MOST UNSTABLE NATIONS IN
THE MIDDLE EAST, HAS ENJOYED A PERIOD OF UNPRECEDENTED
POLITICAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH SINCE THE PRESENT
BAATH LEADERSHIP ASSUMED POWER IN 1970. IN MARCH, 1978,
PRESIDENT HAFEZ AL-ASSAD WAS RE-ELECTED FOR A SECOND TERM.
UNDER PRESIDENT ASSAD, MAJOR STRIDES HAVE BEEN MADE IN

IMPROVING HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES, PARTICULARLY IN THE TREATMENT OF MINORITIES, AND THE LAST YEAR HAS WITNESSED INCREASING OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF THE NEED TO MAKE SIMILAR IMPROVEMENTS IN AREAS WHERE ABUSES CONTINUE. THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE AGAINST A BACKDROP OF SPORADIC INTERNAL VIOLENCE OF A TERRORIST NATURE WHICH EXERTS COUNTERVAILING PRESSURE ON SECURITY GROUNDS AGAINST MOVES TOWARD LIBERALIZATION. WITHIN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, THERE HAVE BEEN MORE THAN A DOZEN ASSASSINATIONS OF OFFICIALS AND REGIME SUPPORTERS, AS WELL AS ADDITIONAL BOMBINGS AND INCIDENTS. SYRIA CONSIDERS ITSELF TO BE IN A STATE OF WAR WITH ISRAEL AND INTENSE HOSTILITY MARKS RELATIONS WITH THE RIVAL BAATH REGIME IN NEIGHBORING IRAQ. FINALLY, SYRIAN FORCES REMAIN DEEPLY INVOLVED AS PART OF THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCE IN LEBANON WHERE THEY HAVE CONFRONTED IN TURN ALMOST ALL OF THE NUMEROUS LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN FACTIONS. THESE FACTORS HAVE COMBINED WITH DOMESTIC TENSION TO CONFRONT THE ASSAD GOVERNMENT WITH A GENUINE INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEM.

1) RESPECT FOR THE INTEGRITY OF THE PERSON, INCLUDING FREEDOM FROM:

A) TORTURE

II.

CHARGES OF THE USE OF TORTURE ARE NUMEROUS, BUT DOCUMENTATION OF ACTUAL CASES IS LIMITED. RECENT INDEPENDENT CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 226456

INVESTIGATION OF THE PHENOMENON UNCOVERED NO NEW CREDIBLE EVIDENCE OF THE ROUTINE USE OF TORTURE. CASES OF WHICH WE HAVE SOME DIRECT KNOWLEDGE PRESENT A MIXED PICTURE. IN SEVERAL RECENT INSTANCES, THERE IS GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT PHYSICAL COERCION, EVEN TO THE POINT OF SERIOUS INJURY, WAS EMPLOYED. IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE SECURITY SERVICES ARE UNAWARE OF THESE SPECIFIC ABUSES. ON THE OTHER HAND, OUR KNOWLEDGE OF SOME RECENT INTERROGATIONS, INCLUDING CASES WITH SECURITY IMPLICATIONS, INDICATES THAT ROUGH TREATMENT OR THREATS SOMETIMES OCCURRED BUT TORTURE WAS NOT USED. THE APPEARANCE IN THE JUNE, 1978 ISSUE OF THE SYRIAN POLICE JOURNAL, PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, OF AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "CRIME OF TORTURING THE ACCUSED TO COERCE HIM INTO CONFESSION" IS A NEW AND PROMISING DEVELOPMENT. ACKNOWLEDGING THAT SOME POLICEMEN SOMETIMES USE TORTURE TO INSURE RESULTS, THE ARTICLE POINTS OUT THAT SUCH METHODS ARE CONTRARY TO LAW

AND REFLECT AN EFFORT TO CONCEAL INEFFICIENCY. ARTICLE 391 OF SYRIAN PENAL CODE ESTABLISHES STIFF PRISON SENTENCES FOR THOSE GUILTY OF USING TORTURE TO EXTRACT INFORMATION OR CONFESSIONS. SINCE PROSECUTIONS UNDER

THIS STATUTE TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE SECURITY COURTS, LITTLE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THEIR FREQUENCY. IT IS KNOWN, HOWEVER, THAT IN A NUMBER OF SPECIFIC CASES COMING TO THE ATTENTION OF THE POLITICAL AUTHORITIES, CORRECTIVE ACTION HAS BEEN TAKEN AND APOLOGIES TENDERED TO THOSE MISTREATED. SUCH ACTIONS ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE NEW OPPENNESS AND CONCERN ABOUT THIS ISSUE REFLECTED IN THE RECENT ARTICLE.

B) CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT
III.

THE DEATH PENALTY IS IN FORCE IN SYRIA, BUT IS RESERVED IN PRACTICE ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FOR THOSE CONVICTED OF TERRORISM OR HOMICIDE INVOLVING SEXUAL ASSAULT. IN THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 226456

LAST YEAR, THE SMALL NUMBER OF PUBLIC HANGINGS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT IN THE PRE-DAWN HOURS AND THE BODIES REMOVED IMMEDIATELY. PRISONERS, WHEN FIRST ARRESTED, ARE FREQUENTLY SLAPPED ABOUT, BUT AVAILABLE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT PRISONERS, ONCE BOOKED, ARE NOT GENERALLY SUBJECTED TO CRUEL OR INHUMAN TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT AND THAT PRISON CONDITIONS ARE TOLERABLE IN TERMS OF HEALTH CARE, FOOD AND FAMILY ACCESS. MANDATORY EXILE IS CONSTITUTIONALLY PROHIBITED BUT LONG-TERM POLITICAL DETAINEES HAVE SOMETIMES REPORTEDLY BEEN OFFERED THE CHOICE OF VOLUNTARY EXILE.

C) ARBITRARY ARREST OR IMPRISONMENT
IV.

CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES OF LIFE, LIBERTY AND PERSONAL SECURITY ARE SOMETIMES CONTRAVENED BY THE SECURITY SERVICES ESPECIALLY IN CASES OF INTERNAL SECURITY. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT ARBITRARY ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT IS NOT SO WIDESPREAD IN SYRIA TODAY AS IS FREQUENTLY BELIEVED. THE CIVILIAN LEGAL CODE, DRAWN DIRECTLY FROM THE FRENCH MODEL, PROVIDES FOR UNLIMITED INVESTIGATIVE DETENTION WITH CERTAIN SAFEGUARDS AGAINST ABUSE THROUGH THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL. UNDER MARTIAL LAW, THE ROLE OF THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL IS ELIMINATED. PRESIDENT ASSAD, IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS LAST MARCH, RECOGNIZED ABUSES OF THE DETENTION POWERS UNDER MARTIAL LAW REGULATIONS AND ORDERED THAT THESE POWERS BE CONFINED TO CASES DEMONSTRABLY INVOLVING STATE SECURITY. AT THE SAME TIME, SYRIAN NEWSPAPERS REPORTED SEVERAL SPECIFIC CASES OF MISUSE OF MARTIAL LAW. ON MARCH 9, 179 INDIVIDUALS WRONGLY DETAINED WERE FREED. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT AWARE

AT THIS TIME OF PUBLISHED INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 STATE 226456

LIBERALIZATION OF MARTIAL LAW ABUSES, THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT WITHIN THE SYRIAN LEGAL PROFESSION THAT SUCH ABUSES HAVE BEEN GREATLY CURTAILED SINCE LAST MARCH. WE WOULD ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF PERSONS UNDER DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL IN THE PRESENT PERIOD AS FOLLOWS: 200-300 DETAINEES (DOWN FROM ABOUT 700 LAST WINTER), ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH SYRIAN PEACEKEEPING ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON, ALL BUT APPROXIMATELY 65 OF WHOM WERE COMBATTANTS IN THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR; 100-300 INVESTIGATIVE DETAINEES AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, ALMOST ALL OF WHOM, ACCORDING TO OUR UNDERSTANDING, WILL BE CHARGED OR RELEASED AFTER ANYWHERE FROM SEVERAL DAYS TO SEVERAL MONTHS; AND FEWER THAN 50 LONG-TERM POLITICAL DETAINEES, SOME OF WHOM HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN OFFERED THE ALTERNATIVE OF VOLUNTARY EXILE IN EXCHANGE FOR A PLEDGE NOT TO ENGAGE IN HOSTILE ACTIVITIES. IN THE PAST YEAR, SEVERAL PROMINENT BAATHIST OPPONENTS OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING SALAH BITAR, HAVE BEEN PARDONED AND PERMITTED TO RETURN TO SYRIA FROM VOLUNTARY EXILE ABROAD.

D) DENIAL OF FAIR PUBLIC TRIAL

V.

THE SYRIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM IS PROUD OF ITS INDEPENDENCE AND GENERALLY PROVIDES FAIR AND OPEN TRIALS. THE RIGHTS OF SOME INDIVIDUALS CHARGED WITH SECURITY OFFENSES, HOWEVER, ARE SOMETIMES VIOLATED BY DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL AND CLOSED TRIALS. SYRIAN COURTS FREQUENTLY ACT IN PRACTICE AS A CHECK ON CONFESSIONS OBTAINED UNDER DURESS, EITHER THROWING OUT CONFESSIONS WHERE COERCION IS SUSPECTED OR REFUSING TO ACCEPT A CONFESSION NOT MADE BEFORE THE JUDGE IN COURT. MILITARY COURTS AND THE STATE SECURITY COURT HOLD SESSIONS IN CAMERA, A FACT WHICH DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT TRIALS ARE INHERENTLY UNFAIR OR DEVOID OF DUE PROCESS. ACQUITTAL OF DEFENDANTS IN THE STATE SECURITY COURT ARE NOT UNKNOWN AND, AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, ONCE A CASE GETS INTO COURT, WHETHER MILITARY, CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 06 STATE 226456

SECURITY OR CIVIL, THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IS RELATIVELY FAIR AND EQUITABLE. THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM BENEFITS IN ADDITION FROM THE SCRUTINY OF THE LAWYERS' SYNDICATE WHICH IS CONCERNED WITH SAFEGUARDING THE INTEGRITY OF THE TRIAL PROCEDURES.

E) INVASION OF THE HOME

VI.

THE SYRIAN LEGAL SYSTEM PROVIDES FORMAL SAFEGUARDS IN THIS AREA, SUPPLEMENTING EXTREMELY STRONG CULTURAL TABOOS REGARDING THE SANCTITY OF THE HOME AND FAMILY. MARTIAL LAW, HOWEVER SUSPENDS THIS PROTECTION IN SECURITY-

RELATED CASES AND THESE SPECIAL POWERS HAVE BEEN ABUSED. DURING THE INVESTIGATION FOLLOWING AN ASSASSINATION IN AUGUST, HOWEVER, THE AUTHORITIES, ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT, FOREBORE RESORT TO MARTIAL LAW POWERS, AND OBTAINED INSTEAD A JUDICIAL WARRANT TO SEARCH EVERY HOUSE ENTERED.

2) GOVERNMENT POLICIES RELATING TO THE FULFILLMENT OF SUCH VITAL NEEDS AS FOOD, SHELTER, HEALTH CARE, AND EDUCATION.

VII.

SYRIA HAS ACHIEVED IN RECENT YEARS NOTEWORTHY ADVANCES IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. ALTHOUGH THE PACE OF SYRIA'S AMBITIOUS -CONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM HAS SLOWED CONSIDERABLY AS A RESULT OF SEVERAL FACTORS, INCLUDING ITS COSTLY INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON, THE MAINTENANCE OF A SIGNIFICANT MILITARY CAPABILITY VIS-A-VIS BOTH ISRAEL AND IRAQ, AND THE UNCERTAINTY OF EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE, THE GOVERNMENT IS DEDICATED -O ACHIEVING THE HIGHER STANDARDS OF LIVING INCREASINGLY DEMANDED BY THE POPULATION.
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 07 STATE 226456

REGIME POLICIES REFLECT A CONCENTRATION ON THE POOR AND RURAL POPULATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT AND HAS WORKED TO PROVIDE LABORERS AND AGRICULTURAL WORKERS A MORE EQUITABLE SHARE OF THE COUNTRY'S RESOURCES. THERE IS NO STARVATION IN SYRIA AND THE GOVERNMENT MAINTAINS SUBSIDIES OF BASIC FOODSTUFFS TO COMBAT THE HIGH INFLATION RATE THE GOVERNMENT, ARMY AND LABOR UNIONS ARE ENGAGED IN MAJOR EFFORTS TO PROVIDE HOUSING TO RELIEVE A CHRONIC SHORTAGE, EXACERBATED BY HIGH RATES OF POPULATION GRO;TH. BASIC HEALTH CARE IS AVAILABLE TO ALL AND THE GOVERNMENT PROGRAM CALL FOR AN EXPENDITURE OF OVER THE NEXT YEARS TO EXPAND AND UPGRADE HEALTH FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. EDUCATION IS FREE UP TO THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL AND MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN ARE ENROLLED IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, ALTHOUGH PHYSICAL PLANTS AND TEACHERS ARE INSUFFICIENT TO ACCOMMODATE ALL POTENTIAL ENROLLEES. TO COUNTERACT ILLITERACY, ARMY CONSCRIPTS ARE NOT DISCHARGED UNTIL THEY HAVE MET MINIMUM STANDARDS.

VIII.

CORRUPTION REMAINS A PROBLEM WHICH PRESIDENT ASSAD HIGH-

LIGHTED WITH HIS ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN BEGINNING IN 1977. WHILE THE CAMPAIGN WAS PUSHED FURTHER THAN MANY SKEPTICS ORIGINALLY ANTICIPATED, ITS MAJOR EFFECTS WERE ON THE MIDDLE AND LOWER LEVELS OF THE BUREAUCRACY AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY. CRITICS HAVE CHARGED THAT THE CAMPAIGN HAS WOUND DOWN WITHOUT DEALING WITH THE ABUSES OF SOME HIGH-RANKING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO, THEY ALLEGE, ARE INVOLVED. INDICTMENTS OF OFFICIALS ON CHARGES OF CORRUPTION OR BRIBERY ARE OCCASIONALLY ANNOUNCED, AS IN THE RECENT CASE OF PERSONS ACCUSED OF CORRUPT PRACTICES IN CONNECTION WITH AIRCRAFT PURCHASES. A NEW PHENOMENON HAS BEEN THE INCREASING TENDENCY OF THE PRESS TO IDENTIFY AND CENSURE OFFICIALS GUILTY OF CORRUPT PRACTICES OR

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 08 STATE 226456

MALFEASANCE. THE DISTORTING EFFECT OF BRIBERY ON THE ECONOMY IS DIFFICULT TO GAUGE BUT IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT OVER THE YEARS THE GOVERNMENT HAS EXPENDED MILLIONS OF DOLLARS PURCHASING SODDY EQUIPMENT OR UNDERTAKING PROJECTS WHICH WERE EITHER UNNECESSARY OR NEVER COMPLETED.

3) RESPECT FOR CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES, INCLUDING:

A) FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, SPEECH, PRESS, RELIGION, AND ASSEMBLY

IX.

ALTHOUGH SYRIA IS PREDOMINANTLY SUNNI MUSLIM, ITS CHRISTIAN, DRUZE, BAHAI, JEWISH, AND SHIA MUSLIM MINORITIES PRACTICE THEIR FAITHS FREELY. A TINY GROUP OF SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS HAS BEEN PROHIBITED FROM OPENLY PRACTICING THEIR RELIGION AND THEIR PROPERTY HELD IN TRUST FOR MANY YEARS, REPORTEDLY BECAUSE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS SUSPECTED A CONNECTION BETWEEN SOME MEMBERS OF THE SECT AND FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE SERVICES. THIS PROBLEM HAS NOT BEEN RESOLVED TO DATE BUT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS VISITED SYRIA IN EARLY 1978 AND WERE RECEIVED BY HIGH-RANKING SYRIAN OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS THE MATTER.

X.

THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN TO PRESERVE INTERNAL SECURITY AND PROVIDE FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE LEADS TO SOME RESTRAINTS ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ASSEMBLY. THE LEGAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE STATE -- THE FIVE POLITICAL PARTIES, THE LEGISLATURE, THE TRADE UNIONS, AND THE SPECIAL AND PROFESSIONAL INTEREST ASSOCIATIONS -- PROVIDE FORA WHERE INDIVIDUALS ENJOY CONSIDERABLE FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ASSEMBLY. DEBATES WITHIN THESE BODIES ARE SURPRISING FREE-WHEELING AND CRITICAL VIEWPOINTS ON FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC TOPICS ARE COMMON. IN PRACTICE, THE LINE IS DRAWN, HOWEVER, AT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 09 STATE 226456

ORGANIZED CRITICISM AND ASSEMBLY OUTSIDE THE FRAMEWORK OF THESE APPROVED FORA.

XI.

THE GOVERNMENT OWNS ALL MEDIA. NEVERTHELESS, NEWSPAPERS ENJOY WIDE LATITUDE TO CRITICIZE DOMESTIC PROGRAMS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MAJORITY OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. THE FAILINGS OF MINISTRY OF HEALTH OFFICIALS TO TAKE PROMPT ACTION LAST YEAR TO SUPPRESS AN OUTBREAK OF CHOLERA, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS SEVERELY CRITICIZED BY THE PRESS AND IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE ROLE OF THE PRINTED MEDIA AS AN INDEPENDENT CONTROL ON ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE ABUSES. BY CONTRAST, THE BROADCAST MEDIA AND WIRE SERVICES FUNCTION AS OFFICIAL ORGANS.

XII.

LABOR ORGANIZATIONS EXIST, USUALLY IN NATIONALIZED INDUSTRIES, BUT ARE INSTRUMENTALITIES OF THE RULING BAATH PARTY. THE UNION LEADERSHIP REPRESENTS ITS MEMBERS' INTERESTS IN OFFICIAL COUNCILS. UNIONS HAVE ACCESS TO LITIGATION IN ALL COURTS AND OTHER JUDICIAL ORGANIZATIONS TO REPRESENT THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE INTERESTS OF THEIR MEMBERS AND ARE ALSO FORMALLY REPRESENTED AT ALL GOVERNMENT PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING LEVELS.

XIII.

SYRIA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY, TODAY NUMBERING SOME 5,300 PERSONS, WAS SUBJECTED TO DISCRIMINATORY GOVERNMENTAL RESTRICTIONS AND OCCASIONAL HARRASSMENT THROUGHOUT THE 1950'S AND 60'S. THEIR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION WAS PROMINENTLY INSCRIBED IN THE SYRIAN IDENTITY DOCUMENTS, THEY COULD SELDOM GAIN ADMITTANCE TO SYRIAN UNIVERSITIES, THEIR BUSINESSES WERE NOT GRANTED EXPORT-IMPORT LICENSES, THEIR RIGHT TO SELL OR OTHERWISE TRANSFER PROPERTY WAS CIRCUMSCRIBED, AND THEY WERE GENERALLY DENIED OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOVERNMENTAL EMPLOYMENT.

XIV.

SINCE 1974, THE U.S. HAS MADE ITS CONCERN KNOWN TO THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 10 STATE 226456

SYRIAN GOVERNMENT DIRECTLY. FROM 1974 THROUGH 1976, SOME OF THE MORE ONEROUS RESTRICTIONS WERE RELAXED. IN A SIGNIFICANT, POSITIVE STEP, THE GOVERNMENT ISSUED A SERIES OF DECREES IN LATE 1976 AND EARLY 1977 INTENDED TO ELIMINATE VIRTUALLY ALL OFFICIALLY-SPONSORED FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SYRIA'S JEWISH COMMUNITY EXCEPT THE PROHIBITION AGAINST EMIGRATING FREELY.

B) FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT WITHIN THE COUNTRY, FOREIGN TRAVEL
AND EMIGRATION

XV.

INTERNAL TRAVEL WITHIN SYRIA IS UNRESTRICTED WITH THE
EXCEPTION OF SECURITY ZONES. SYRIAN CITIZENS WISHING TO
TRAVEL ABROAD MUST OBTAIN PASSPORTS WHICH ARE SOMETIMES
DIFFICULT TO SECURE. ANY SYRIAN CAN BE REQUIRED TO POST A
BOND WHICH WOULD BE FORFEITED IN CASE OF NON-RETURN.

EMIGRATION IS DISCOURAGED, BUT A FORMAL BAN ON EMIGRATION
EXISTS ONLY IN THE CASE OF CERTAIN CATEGORIES OF CITIZENS,
SUCH AS MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, PERSONS ELIGIBLE
FOR MILITARY SERVICE, AND DOCTORS, SCIENTISTS AND ENGINEERS
TRAINED AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE WHO HAVE NOT PRACTICED THEIR
PROFESSION IN SYRIA FOR A TEN-YEAR PERIOD. THE PROHIBITION
AGAINST JEWISH EMIGRATION HAS BEEN LIFTED IN A SO-FAR
LIMITED NUMBER OF CASES, PRIMARILY INVOLVING UNMARRIED
WOMEN AND FAMILY REUNIONS. WE BELIEVE FURTHER EASING OF
THIS RULE WILL OCCUR ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS.

C) FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS

XVI.

THERE IS UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE IN SYRIA. WOMEN MAY AND ARE
ENCOURAGED TO VOTE, BUT GENERALLY DO NOT EXERCISE THIS
RIGHT FOR CULTURAL REASONS. LOW VOTER TURN-OUT IN THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 11 STATE 226456

MOST RECENT ELECTIONS--THOSE FOR THE PEOPLES COUNCIL
(PARLIAMENT) IN AUGUST, 1977 AND THE RE-ELECTION OF PRESI-
DENT ASSAD IN FEBRUARY, 1978--HAS BEEN A MATTER OF SERIOUS
CONCERN TO THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES. CANDIDATES FOR PARLIA-
MENT ARE CHOSEN BY THE RULING BAATH PARTY AND THE FOUR
OTHER PARTIES FROM AMONG THEIR MEMBERS AND INDEPENDENTS.
OPPOSITION LISTS OF INDEPENDENTS ARE FREELY OFFERED BUT DO
NOT ENJOY THE ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT OF THE PROGRESSIVE
NATIONAL FRONT SLATE, AND ONLY RARELY PREVAIL.

XVII.

IN AN APPARENT EFFORT TO INCREASE POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN
GOVERNMENT, ELECTIONS FOR THE COUNCILS OF THE GOVERNORATES
(PROVINCES) ARE NOW BEING SUPPLEMENTED BY LOCAL ELECTIONS
FOR TOWN AND VILLAGE COUNCILS, WHERE LOCAL ISSUES OF CON-
CERN TO THE ELECTORATE ARE MORE DEMONSTRABLY AT STAKE.
ADDITIONALLY, THE ROLE OF THE PEOPLES COUNCIL IS BEING
HIGHLIGHTED BY PUBLICATION OF ITS CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT
POLICY AND THE NEW VIGOR OF THE LEGISLATURE IN VETOING OR
AMENDING LEGISLATION. ONE OBSERVABLE RESULT HAS BEEN A
MARKED INCREASE IN THE QUESTIONS FORMALLY SUBMITTED TO THE
GOVERNMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLES COUNCIL.

XVIII.

WOMEN ARE NOT OFFICIALLY DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, BUT MANY HAVE YET TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM. WOMEN HAVE, HOWEVER, SERVED AT CABINET LEVEL AND OCCUPY INFLUENTIAL POLICY-MAKING POSITIONS IN THE BUREAUCRACY, AS WELL AS FULL ACCESS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL.

4) GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE AND RECORD REGARDING INTERNATIONAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

XIX.

THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IS SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM OF ITS HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD AND HAS OFTEN REACTED BY REJECTING
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 12 STATE 226456

ALLEGATIONS OUTRIGHT OR IGNORING THEM. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE SYRIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE ANSWERED SOME QUERIES FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND DID RECEIVE AI OFFICIALS IN DAMASCUS IN 1977 AND 1978. THIS COMMUNICATION IS CONTINUING. SYRIA HAS ALSO PROVEN RECEPTIVE TO VISITS BY MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY AND HAS ALLOWED THEM TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN CONTACTS WITH THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN SYRIA.

XX.

DOMESTICALLY, THE LAWYERS' SYNDICATE, THE JURISTS' ASSOCIATION AND THE LEAGUE FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA HAVE EXHIBITED RENEWED VITALITY IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS OVER THE LAST YEAR OR MORE. CHRISTOPHER

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, HUMAN RIGHTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 sep 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE226456
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: MACASEY/JUNHOWELL
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780363-0888
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780993/aaaacypq.tel
Line Count: 473
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c7f76856-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY, STADIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 9
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY, STADIS
Reference: 78 STATE 212848
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1517617
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: 1978 CONGRESSIONAL COUNTRY REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES: SYRIA
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, SY
To: DAMASCUS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c7f76856-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014